Rural Teacher Recruitment and Retention Practices: A Review of the Research Literature, National Survey of Rural Superintendents, and Case Studies of Programs in Virginia

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Executive Summary

In 2004, Edvantia, Inc. (formerly AEL) and the National Association of State Boards of Education (NASBE) initiated an effort to identify successful strategies for recruiting and retaining highly qualified teachers in rural areas. They reviewed non-rural-specific and rural-specific research and practice literature, surveyed rural superintendents across the nation, and conducted case studies of three Virginia programs that support teacher recruitment and retention.

Generally, the literature shows that the problem of teacher shortages varies across geography, demography, and subject area. The schools that find it hardest to recruit and retain highly qualified teachers are those in highly urban and rural areas (especially those serving minority or low-income students) and schools in the Southeast, Southwest, and the West. Especially needed are teachers in special education, bilingual education, math, and science. Edvantia/NASBE survey results and case studies amplify these findings and offer insights into challenges and promising practices in rural teacher recruitment and retention.

Literature Review

Rural-specific literature identifies four challenges related to recruiting and retaining teachers in rural areas: (1) lower pay; (2) geographic and social isolation; (3) difficult working conditions, such as having to teach classes in multiple subject areas; and (4) NCLB requirements for highly qualified teachers (e.g., many rural teachers will need certification in multiple subject areas, and professional development opportunities can sometimes be scarce in rural communities). Collectively, these challenges can place rural schools and districts at a competitive disadvantage in attracting and retaining well-qualified teachers.

At the national level, the merits of a variety of practices are being examined and debated, including a "national manpower policy" for education, alternative certification programs, various incentives for teaching in hard-to-staff schools, mandatory induction and mentoring programs, and improvements in the culture and working conditions of schools. A survey of literature on state and district strategies reveals five major strategies currently being used for recruiting and retaining teachers: (1) grow-your-own initiatives, especially those that help paraprofessionals become certified teachers; (2) targeted incentives directed at teachers willing to teach in schools or subject areas in which the need is greatest; (3) improved recruitment and hiring practices; (4) improved school-level support for teachers, including formal induction and mentoring programs; and (5) use of interactive technologies to meet information and professional development needs.

A look at rural-specific and general literature shows agreement that effective recruitment and retention practices share four characteristics: They are (1) strategic,

(2) specific to the schools or subject areas that are hard to staff, (3) sustained, and (4) rooted in the community.

A review of the research and practice literature suggests 14 promising strategies for placing high-quality teachers in rural classrooms and keeping them there: (1) collect state and local data on teacher supply and demand, (2) base recruitment efforts on data analysis, (3) increase the pool of candidates by expanding or refining recruitment efforts, (4) include all vital partners in collaborative efforts, (5) offer targeted incentives, (6) evaluate efforts regularly, (7) invest in grow-your-own initiatives to develop teachers, (8) encourage universities to customize teacher education programs, (9) include building-level staff in the hiring process, (10) institute formal induction programs, (11) offer incentives for staying on past the first year, (12) improve the school's culture and working conditions, (13) involve the community in welcoming new teachers, and (14) invest in leadership development.

National Survey

A total of 597 superintendents from a random selection of 1,565 school districts completed the survey with valid data and returned the questionnaire, yielding an overall response rate of 38%. The responses of these 597 superintendents reflect the recruiting and retention practices of approximately 1,900 schools serving more than 718,000 elementary, middle school, and high school students from rural areas.

Survey results echo the literature review's finding that districts located near urban areas may have greater advantages when compared to districts not located near an urban area. Districts located near an urban area have more schools within the district and serve more students than those districts not located near an urban area. However, these same schools also report having fewer students qualifying for free or reduced-price lunches, indicating that those schools not located near urban areas may have substantially more students living in poverty.

Rural districts reported that their greatest challenges in recruiting and retaining teachers are geographic and social isolation as well as being in close proximity to higher-paying districts.

The most frequently cited recruitment methods were the use of statewide/local/Internet advertising, personal contacts, and networking. Strategies for locating potential teachers included involving building-level staff in the recruitment and hiring process, promoting the advantages of living and teaching in a rural area, and offering more competitive salaries. Given the resources present in rural districts, the limited reliance on the use of targeted incentives, housing and relocation assistance, and collecting relevant data on teacher supply and demand is not surprising.

Teachers who stay in rural districts are thought to do so as a result of enjoying their position and the overall school and community environment, as well as the salary

and benefits or the stability and convenience of being in one area. While some superintendents indicate that teachers leave for personal reasons or to relocate, other reasons include poor money and benefits, dissatisfaction with working in a small school and living in a rural environment, and reduced opportunities.

Case Studies

In 2002, Virginia received a three-year $13.5 million federal Teacher Quality Enhancement Grant to develop and implement strategies to train and retain high-quality teachers. The grant was used to fund five recruitment and retention efforts. The Appalachia Educational Laboratory at Edvantia and NASBE used a case study approach to examine four of these programs: the Teachers for Tomorrow Program, a precollege recruitment effort; the Career Switcher program, aimed at attracting mid-career teacher candidates; the Teacher Mentoring Pilot Program, which supports a variety of new teacher induction programs; and the Teach in Virginia Program, a statewide Web-based teacher recruitment program.

Data were collected via document reviews and semi-structured interviews in participating schools located in seven rural Virginia school divisions. Documents reviewed included Virginia Department of Education reports and program descriptions and materials. Interviews were conducted with 51 individuals, including 3 state directors, 6 division and school administrators, 4 program instructors, 19 students, 6 teacher candidates, 6 mentors, and 13 beginning teachers. A survey was conducted of contact persons in 37 school divisions that participated in the Teach in Virginia Program.

Each of the programs studied is in the early stages of implementation; therefore, little data exist to indicate the overall effect on rural teacher recruitment and retention. Preliminary data indicate, however, that each of these programs holds promise. The researchers concluded that two factors are critical to the programs' continued success: ensuring adequate funding and allowing rural school districts to adapt programs to meet their needs.

Background and Purpose

A growing body of research indicates that the most important thing schools can do to improve student achievement is to ensure there is a high-quality teacher in every classroom. Other recent research suggests that the problem of shortages in qualified teachers is primarily one of distribution. The greatest shortage is among teachers who are both qualified and willing to teach in traditionally hard-to-staff schools, including urban and rural schools (Hare & Heap, 2001; Ingersoll, 2001, Voke, 2002). The more stringent teacher qualifications required under the federal No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (NCLB) have intensified the urgency for dealing with the problem of supplying all classrooms with qualified teachers.

The circumstances of rural districts and schools create special challenges. The small populations and geographic isolation of many rural schools affect their access to resources, including the size of the pool of applicants and the ability to offer competitive salaries and teacher support programs. Rural schools face this problem both in specific grades and in specific curriculum areas (Murphy, DeArmond, & Guinn, 2003; National Association of State Boards of Education [NASBE], 1998).

According to information collected for the Common Core of Data (CCD) by the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) (2004), in the year 2002–2003, 7,824 school districts were classified as rural (i.e., have locale codes of 7 or 8). These rural school districts comprised 24,350 schools serving 7,618,077 students with approximately 523,191 full-time equivalent (FTE) teachers.[1] Rural school districts make up nearly half (49%) of all public school districts in the nation.

Information on effective rural teacher recruitment and retention is thin, and states and school districts are clamoring for guidance from studies on "best practices." More diverse paths for entering the teaching profession could broaden the applicant pool and improve the likelihood of hiring and retaining effective, creative teachers. Educators and policymakers recognize the need to expand recruitment and retention efforts and are responding with a range of programs to entice potential candidates into the field and keep them there.

The Appalachia Educational Laboratory at Edvantia and the National Association of State Boards of Education (NASBE) agreed to partner in 2004 to (1) review current literature on rural teacher recruitment and retention efforts, (2) survey districts across the nation to learn about approaches they are taking, and (3) follow innovative models being implemented in rural school districts in Virginia.

[1] It should be noted that FTE data were not available for teachers in 75 districts with locale codes of 7 or 8. Further, CCD statistics indicated that 35 districts had no FTE teachers but did not serve students.

Review of the Research and Practice Literature

The purpose of the review of literature was to locate research- and practice-based information on rural teacher recruitment and retention efforts. Also reviewed were significant national reports that address teacher recruitment and retention in general, as well as in hard-to-staff schools. The result is a summary of characteristics shared by those models and practices that show promise or evidence of success.

Methodology

Using the ERIC database, key-word searches were conducted to identify research reports and journal articles published between 1993 and September 2003 on the topic of rural teacher recruitment and retention.[2] The initial descriptors used were *geographic isolation, one-teacher schools, rural areas, rural education,* and *rural schools.* Major descriptors used to narrow the search were *faculty mobility, teacher employment, teacher persistence, teacher recruitment,* and *teacher shortage.* This search located 43 papers, reports, and journal articles.

Also searched were the U.S. Department of Education Web site and the Web sites of national organizations concerned with rural education, including the Rural School and Community Trust, Organizations Concerned about Rural Education, the National Rural Education Association, and the American Association of School Administrators. Finally, an Internet search was conducted, using combinations of the descriptors used for the ERIC search as well as the phrases *best practices, successful models,* and *successful programs*. Reference lists of recent reports were scanned; sources that seemed significant or highly relevant were reviewed.

Limitations of Review and Research

Because demographic, economic, and legislative changes during the past century have had a continuous impact on rural communities and their schools, it was decided that the most recent literature would be the most relevant to this review, which aims to inform political and administrative leadership about current challenges and approaches to rural teacher recruitment and retention. For this reason, the ERIC search was limited to the most current materials, i.e., those published between 1993 and September 2003 that focused on recruiting and retaining rural teachers. The Internet search generated appropriate rural-specific information published between 1998 and September 2004. Because rural-specific research on the topic is sparse, the majority of this information consists of surveys, statistical reports, and policy briefings from state and national

[2] Due to the redesign of the ERIC system, collection of materials for the ERIC database ceased in the fall of 2003 for a period of approximately one year. Consequently, materials published or produced during late 2003 through the fall of 2004 were not available in the ERIC database and had to be located through other methods.

organizations. The literature search revealed that attention to the topic of teacher recruitment and retention in general has increased in recent years. In fact, the tremendous volume of non-rural-specific literature written on the topic since 2000 made reviewing all of it impractical. Therefore, the documents that received the most attention were those that were most recent, reported research studies on the topic or closely related topics, condensed or summarized other available literature, or were frequently cited or discussed in other reports.

Much of this literature emphasizes difficulties in urban retention and recruitment. Rural difficulties are often mentioned in passing, but rural-specific data and examples are rarely included. It appears that rural-specific literature on the topic has not kept pace with other literature on the topic; 24 of the 43 rural-specific documents identified via the ERIC search were published prior to 1999.

Findings

The literature review revealed both general and rural-specific problems related to teacher recruitment and retention.

The general problem of teacher recruitment and retention. Recent non-rural-specific studies show that the problem of teacher shortages varies across geography, demography, and subject area, leading a number of researchers to conclude that the problem is largely one of distribution (Ingersoll, 2001; Murphy & DeArmond, 2003b; NASBE, 1998; Voke, 2002). The challenge centers on identifying teachers who are both qualified and willing to teach in "hard-to-staff" schools. Typically, hard-to-staff schools include those in highly urban and rural areas, especially those schools serving minority or low-income students. Shortages also exist in certain geographic regions in the country (the Southeast, Southwest, and the West) and in particular specialties such as special education, bilingual education, and math and science education (Murphy, DeArmond, & Guinn, 2003; NASBE, 1998).

Some researchers argue that teacher shortages are not so much the result of too few people entering the field, but of too many teachers leaving the profession (Ingersoll, 2001; National Commission on Teaching and America's Future [NCTAF], 2003). According to Ingersoll's analysis of data from the National Center for Education Statistics, almost a third of America's teachers leave the field sometime during their first three years of teaching. Almost half leave after five years. In many low-income communities and rural areas, the rates of attrition are even higher (NCTAF, 2003, p. 24).

Challenges specific to rural districts. The rural-specific literature identifies four primary challenges faced by rural schools and districts: lower pay, geographic and social isolation, difficult working conditions, and No Child Left Behind (NCLB) requirements for highly qualified teachers (Collins, 1999; Jimerson, 2004; McClure, Redfield, & Hammer, 2003; Reeves, 2003).

Lower pay. According to the Educational Research Service (2004), staff in rural schools earned lower-than-average pay in every employment category. In 2003-2004, rural teacher salaries averaged $41,131 compared to $43,460 for small towns and $50,844 for suburban areas (the biggest competitors for rural teaching talent). The Rural

School and Community Trust reported that the four lowest average salaries are all in Northern Plains states and, in general, the highest rural salaries are in large urban states[3] (Beeson & Strange, 2003). Rural states tend to pay less than more populated/industrialized states and, within states, rural schools and districts tend to pay less than their urban and suburban counterparts (Jimerson, 2003). A 2004 report by the U.S. Government Accountability Office reported that rural superintendents see their districts' inability to provide competitive salaries for highly qualified teachers as a major obstacle to fulfilling the requirements of NCLB legislation.

Geographic and social isolation. Geography also plays an important role in rural schools' ability to attract and retain teachers. Geographically isolated communities tend to have greater problems in attracting teachers, while rural schools and districts located on the outskirts of suburban areas have greater difficulty in retaining teachers. Several researchers have suggested reasons underlying this circumstance. Collins (1999), in a review of the literature on rural teacher retention, cited a survey of teacher mobility in one rural district that found four main reasons why teachers leave communities: (1) geographic isolation, (2) climate/weather, (3) distance from larger communities and family, and (4) inadequate shopping (Murphy & Angelski, 1996/1997). Isolation is particularly unappealing to young, beginning teachers (Proffit, Sale, Alexander, & Andrews, 2002). On the other hand, rural schools located close to suburban areas are often able to attract teachers but tend to lose them after only a few years. It may be that new teachers view these rural areas as attractive places to begin their teaching careers, but soon move to higher paying positions in the nearby suburban schools. Some analysts (Collins, 1999; Harris, 2001) theorize that teachers who stay in rural areas are more likely to have grown up in small communities or to be committed to living in the region. A study that surveyed 86 special education teachers in rural states concluded that "staying seemed to be a matter of having roots in the community" (Bornfield, Hall, Hall, & Hoover, 1997).

Difficult working conditions. Other non-rural-specific studies have found that poor working conditions are frequently cited as primary reasons why teachers leave the field (Charlotte Advocates for Education, 2004; Luekens, Lyter, Fox, & Chandler, 2004). Working conditions cited by teachers as contributing to their decisions to leave include lack of basic resources and materials, lack of a strong professional community, ineffective leadership, and discipline issues. Teachers report that large class sizes and the physical conditions of schools impair teaching. Teachers also report feeling overwhelmed by paperwork and the limited time to plan and prepare for instruction. A study that surveyed Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools demonstrated that principals play a role in whether teachers stay. Principals create stress for new teachers when they are ineffective managers, lack organization and planning skills, and provide little or no support (Charlotte Advocates for Education, 2004).

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[3]An exception is Alaska, a rural state that has higher salary levels and higher costs of living.

While it is true that some of these issues are not as prevalent in rural schools as elsewhere (e.g., schools and class sizes are often smaller, and discipline is reported to be less of a problem), rural schools, and particularly small rural high schools, face a unique problem in terms of working conditions. Teachers in many schools must teach multiple disciplines due to low student enrollment, and teaching "out of field" is common in small rural high schools, which cannot afford to hire teachers to cover, for example, one class each of higher-level math and science courses (Jimerson, 2003; 2004). Having more classes to prepare for means greater workloads for rural teachers, often for less pay than their suburban and urban counterparts.

NCLB requirements for highly qualified teachers. Under the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001, by the end of the 2005-2006 school year, all teachers must be highly qualified (some rural schools have until 2006-2007). A *highly qualified* teacher is one with full state certification, a bachelor's degree, and demonstrated competence in all subjects they teach (U.S. Department of Education, 2002). Given the common practice of out-of-field teaching, rural schools and districts face a difficult challenge in meeting this requirement. Researchers and advocates for rural schools argue that this requirement increases the existing competitive disadvantage for rural hard-to-staff and low-resource schools (Jimerson, 2003; Southeast Center for Teaching Quality, 2004). Combined with the lower salaries, more stringent certification requirements add another disincentive for teachers to take positions in rural schools. Teachers will need to pass multiple tests, unlike teachers in urban or suburban schools, who may need to pass only one test (Jimerson, 2004; Reeves, 2003).

Further, it will be difficult for many rural teachers to obtain the required certifications for all subject areas they teach because they are often separated by long distances from colleges and training facilities. Rural district officials reported in a U.S. Government Accountability Office (2004) study that the limited availability of professional development opportunities posed challenges to recruiting and retaining highly qualified teachers. Even when professional development opportunities are found, the limited availability of substitute teachers in small districts makes it difficult to release teachers to attend training.

Collectively, lower salaries, social and professional isolation, difficult working conditions, and NCLB requirements for highly qualified teachers can place rural schools and districts at a competitive disadvantage in attracting and retaining well-qualified teachers.

Promising Practices

The findings from this literature review indicate that an increasing number of teacher recruitment and retention programs are being implemented at state and local levels, but not much is known about their effectiveness. A search for research and other literature on model programs and practices that are *rural-specific* and *successful* turned up little information. Policy analyst Lorna Jimerson of the Rural School and Community Trust confirmed that rural-specific information is sparse and commented that a literature

review on successful recruitment and retention practices for rural districts is "sorely needed" (personal communication, March 22, 2004).

The U.S. Department of Education published a literature review on teacher recruitment programs (Clewell, Darke, Davis-Googe, Forcier, & Manes, 2000) as part of a multiyear evaluation of the Higher Education Act's Title II programs to recruit teachers. The authors offered four findings based on their review: (1) There are useful data at the national level on sources of teacher supply; (2) there is a need to determine the supply and demand of teachers at the state and local levels; (3) there is a lack of evaluation data on the effectiveness of existing models; and (4) there has been little effort to develop a coherent, holistic plan that connects state, local, and private initiatives in teacher recruitment.

At the national level, the merits of a variety of practices are being examined and debated, including a "national manpower policy" for education (Darling-Hammond & Sykes, 2003; NCTAF, 2003, p. 30), alternative certification programs (Feistritzer, 2004; Legler, 2002; Newman & Thomas, 1999; Southeast Center for Teaching Quality, 2001), various incentives for teaching in hard-to-staff schools (Jimerson, 2003; Prince, 2002), mandatory induction and mentoring programs (Ingersoll & Kralik, 2004; Smith & Ingersoll, 2003), and improvements in the culture and working conditions of schools (Johnson, Birkeland, Kardos, Kauffman, Liu, & Peske, 2001).

Our survey of general and rural-specific literature, which focused on state and district recruitment and retention strategies, revealed five major strategies for recruiting and retaining teachers: (1) "grow-your-own" initiatives, including career-switchers programs, that nurture local talent through collaborations among public school systems and postsecondary institutions; (2) targeted incentives; (3) improved recruitment and hiring practices, especially those that use state and local data; (4) improved school-level support for teachers; and (5) use of interactive technologies to help alleviate the problems rural schools face in recruiting and retaining high-quality teachers. Each of these strategies is discussed below.

Before we begin a discussion of strategies, however, it should be noted that the Rural School and Community Trust conducted a policy inventory on rural teacher shortages (Jimerson, 2002) and identified promising practices for rural districts. The author of the unpublished policy inventory noted that most of the strategies require additional financial investments, which can make them difficult for poorer districts to implement. According to Jimerson (2002), this points to the necessity of more equitable distribution of aid within states—a policy concern that underscores the importance of state-level cooperation and responsiveness to local needs.

Each of the practices listed below has been employed in various rural locations with some degree of success, although the evidence of this success is based more on anecdotal evidence than on research. Programs in Virginia, the focus of case studies later in this report, are not highlighted here.

"Grow-your-own" initiatives (including career-switchers programs) involving collaborations between schools and higher education. Citing programs in Georgia, North Carolina, and South Carolina, the Southeast Center for Teaching Quality (2002b) identifies "developing local talent" as having merit in expanding the pool of

teachers. Debra Hare and James Heap (2001), in a survey of midwestern superintendents, also cite the high potential of "grow-your-own" strategies but report them as being "underused" in the rural Midwest. In designing initiatives, it is important to improve access to teacher education programs for individuals in a variety of situations: high school students, out-of-field teachers, school paraprofessionals, and second-career adults. In economically distressed areas, tuition assistance and other forms of financial support can be especially important.

Especially promising are programs that target paraprofessionals who already work in rural schools (Eubanks, 2001). A number of studies cite findings that indicate rural schools can and do reap significant benefits from programs tailored to help school paraprofessionals attain the education and credentials they need to become teachers (Clewell & Villegas, 2001; Eubanks, 2001; Southeast Center for Teaching Quality, 2002b). Beatriz Chu Clewell and Ana Maria Villegas (2001) point out that these candidates are more likely to continue teaching in high-need areas.

Many documents mention strategies that involve collaboration among the community and community colleges and/or universities in efforts to develop and nurture local talent (Churchill, Jensen, & Cepello, 2001; Collins, 1999; Davis, 2002; Harmon, 2001; Harris, 2001; Jensen, Churchill, & Davis, 2001; Proffit et al., 2002). Collaborations among school districts and universities can improve teacher preparation programs by making them responsive to local needs. Such collaborations are also a vital component of many "grow-your-own" programs. For example:

- Wyoming has established three Professional Development Schools in high-need areas of the state to prepare college and postgraduate students to teach in local K-12 schools. The Professional Development Schools involve a university, community college, and school district (Holloway, 2002).
- In Georgia, a paraprofessional program at Armstrong State University in Savannah has produced 65 credentialed teachers in hard-to-staff districts since 1993, with a 94 percent retention rate (Southeast Center for Teaching Quality, 2002b).
- In North Dakota, special education teachers trained in various specialty areas were spending large portions of their days traveling from site to site. To address this situation, the University of North Dakota changed its teacher preparation program for special education teachers to include training in case management and serving students with various disabilities. As a result, a small school can retain one special education teacher who spends the entire day at the school, and students can be served in the least restrictive environments (Education Commission of the States, 2001).
- In Arizona, a rural district established partnerships with two out-of-state universities—Southern Utah University and Montana State University—whose teacher training programs were likely to include students already comfortable with living in rural areas. The Arizona district provided student teaching opportunities for prospective teachers and the possibility of subsequent employment. The district ended up hiring 6 of the first 10 student teachers who participated in the program (Crews, 2002).

- In a rural, economically depressed county in Virginia, the school district teamed with Wytheville Community College and Radford University to form the Appalachian Model Teaching Consortium, which created a structured curriculum path for high school students interested in teaching. Articulation agreements among the schools allow students to begin earning college credit in high school, continue for two years at the local community college, complete an undergraduate degree at the university, and return to student teach in the county school system. A scholarship to support students in the program has been established, and students who accept scholarship money are expected to teach in the school system for a minimum of three years (Proffit et al., 2002).

Available data indicate that grow-your-own strategies are often viewed as successful by those involved, but it appears that further research is needed to determine what types of programs (1) work best in particular settings or with particular populations, (2) are effective in relieving shortages in high-need subject areas, and (3) produce the most effective teachers. A caution about "grow-your-own" strategies—while many such programs produce new teachers, program evaluations show that unless the programs are targeted at producing teachers in high-need subject areas (math, science, special education), they are not likely to alleviate shortages in these critical areas (Clewell et al., 2000).

According to Watts Hull (2003), alternative certification and career-switchers programs are very popular at the state and district levels. Almost every state offers such programs, but researchers and policymakers debate their desirability and effectiveness (Voke, 2002). An Infobrief published by the Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development (Voke, 2002) described one program that showed success in recruiting teachers to rural areas and keeping them there. The Pathways to Teaching Careers Program places qualified returning Peace Corps volunteers in urban and rural school districts and provides a two-year, graduate-level program that leads to a teaching certificate and a master's degree. Evaluations show that these teachers are likely to teach in high-need schools and subject areas, are perceived to be more effective than typical beginning teachers, and are more likely to remain in teaching after three years. Another successful initiative of the Pathways to Teaching Careers Program focuses on identifying and recruiting paraprofessionals and noncertified teachers.

Targeted incentives. A number of researchers and national education organizations have recently argued that states should focus greater attention on developing programs that target persons who are willing to work in hard-to-staff schools and positions (Ingersoll, 2001; NASBE, 1998; Voke, 2002). To be effective, financial incentives must strategically target teachers willing to teach where the need is greatest: high-poverty schools, remote areas, or hard-to-fill subject areas. Even then, Holloway (2002) cautions, salary alone won't guarantee that a teacher will stay in an isolated region. In Wyoming, despite enacting the highest teacher salary increase in the nation for the 2001-2002 school year, "overall teacher attrition continued to climb upward" as teachers transferred from the western part of the state and into schools located near larger towns (pp. 144-145). Incentives other than salary should target local challenges; a common one in rural areas is suitable housing. One state that is dealing with this challenge is Mississippi, where the Employer-Assisted Housing Teacher Program

provides interest-free loans to licensed teachers in areas of critical shortage (Education Commission of the States, 2001, p. 2). The state also offers loan repayment for students who teach in rural areas (Rural School and Community Trust, 1999).

Improved recruitment and hiring practices. "Few states have developed specific programs to address the problems of rural teacher recruitment and retention," according to Timothy Collins, writing in 1999 (p. 2). Other observations about recruitment and hiring practices include the following:

- Rural schools are not effectively promoting the advantages of living and teaching in rural areas (Harmon, 2001).
- Only three states (North Carolina, Pennsylvania, and South Carolina) have a common application form that can be used in any district in the state, reports the National Commission on Teaching and America's Future (2003, p. 11)
- Job seekers rarely have opportunities for two-way interactions that involve the principal and teachers, a practice that is especially important in rural areas with culturally distinct populations (Liu, 2003).

Examples of state programs include these:

- Alaska has established a statewide clearinghouse for job openings and for posting candidate résumés (Rural School and Community Trust, 1999).
- Many states are working to increase the pool of potential teachers by expanding recruitment activities to high schools and middle schools (Watts Hull, 2003).
- Some states are providing opportunities for nontraditional candidates to pursue alternative certification—teaching in classrooms while pursuing full certification (Watts Hull, 2003).

Improved school-level support for teachers. Some have argued that strategies aimed at increasing the supply of teachers are not likely to be effective if they ignore the high turnover rate of new teachers (Ingersoll, 2001; Ingersoll & Kralik, 2004; Johnson et al., 2001). While all types of districts report problems retaining new teachers, this problem is pronounced in schools located in low-income areas (Hare & Heap, 2001; NASBE, 1998). A number of rural advocates and researchers have suggested that the greatest opportunity to ensure adequate numbers of qualified, competent teachers is the establishment of high-quality induction and mentoring programs. Unfortunately, a recent study by the Southeast Center for Teaching Quality (2004) found that few high-need schools have moved beyond signing bonuses to more comprehensive approaches such as better working conditions and long-term support for teachers.

New teachers cite "lack of support" as their top concern, according to the National Education Association (n.d.). The first year of teaching can be especially critical for rural teachers who are new to a community (Lemke, 1994). Induction and mentoring programs are frequently cited as valuable supports for beginning teachers. When Richard Ingersoll and Jeffrey Kralik (2004) reviewed the research, they found empirical support for claims that such programs have a positive impact on teachers and their retention. Some researchers point to the importance of improving support for *all* teachers, not only those who are beginning their careers. "Clever incentives may attract new teachers, but only

improving the culture and working conditions of schools will keep them," state Susan Johnson and associates (2001, p. 1). One effort toward improvement is the California New Teacher Project, which includes an induction component that tests alternative models of support for beginning teachers across the state. "Effective induction models reduced attrition among first- and second-year teachers by two-thirds," and retention rates improved for teachers working in rural areas (Clewell et al., 2000, p. 41).

Technology. Technology can provide the tools to improve both the recruitment and retention of teachers in rural areas. It can be used to bridge the isolation gap in rural areas by providing support, information, and resources to educators. According to Hobbs (2004), barriers such as hard-to-staff classes or course scheduling problems caused by the need for multiple certifications can be overcome through distance learning. In addition, distance-learning technology can provide professional development and continuing education opportunities for teachers. Distance learning technologies may facilitate cross-district mentoring relationships between new and experienced teachers. Moreover, student services such as speech therapy, psychological testing, counseling, and individual assessment may be accessed through two-way interactive television technologies.

- The New Haven, California, school district uses its Web site as a primary recruiting tool (Davis, 2004). The comprehensive and informative Web site provides prospective teachers with the information they need to make an informed decision. The district's Web site began as a way to recruit and retain teachers and evolved into a system of support for new teachers. New Haven has used technology to bridge the gaps between hiring and induction, between schools and the central office, and between university and school personnel.
- In Montana, the Education Development Center's Center for Online Professional Development trains local teachers to develop and facilitate online workshops. Online courses provide opportunities for teachers to discuss difficult issues, solve problems, and develop their skills in a supportive environment (Davis, 2004).
- The New Teacher Center in Santa Cruz, California, offers e-mentoring networks for beginning and experienced science teachers, scientists, and school administrators. The network includes online mentoring, online seminars focused on content and examination of student work, and leadership training for mentors and scientists (Davis, 2004).
- The Missouri Education Renewal Zone Initiative arranges partnerships between teacher education institutions, teacher and technology support organizations, and K-12 school districts with the goal of rearticulating, restructuring, and reinventing the policies and practices for recruiting, preparing, and retaining rural teachers (Hobbs, 2003).
- The Tennessee Department of Education includes online professional development as part of its Reading First program. Course offerings are designed to help K-3 teachers, K-12 special education teachers, and building-level administrators as they implement a reading program grounded in scientifically based reading research. The custom-developed courses have been delivered by the Region IV Comprehensive Center at AEL (now Edvantia) to more than 1,800 teachers and administrators across the state. Participants receive 24 (of 90

required) continuing education units for each course. The state department sees this method of professional development delivery as one strategy for helping teachers meet the state's highly qualified teacher requirements (Ross, Thigpin, Cavalluzzo, Guzman, & Patterson, 2004).

While the practices identified above have shown promise for recruiting and retaining teachers in rural areas, authors such as Holloway (2002) stress the need for states to create a "package of solutions" to address "the multiple dimensions of teacher quality issues in rural states" (p. 151).

Characteristics of Successful Recruitment and Retention Practices

A look at rural-specific and general literature shows agreement that successful recruitment and retention practices share several characteristics, which can be categorized as *strategic, specific,* and *sustained*. A distinguishing characteristic of rural retention is the importance of community "rootedness" in countering isolation.

Strategic recruitment and retention practices. Being strategic involves employing local data to analyze needs, develop plans, and make decisions; having appropriate collaborators at the state, district, and local levels; and leveraging available resources to maximize results. When Patrick Murphy and Michael DeArmond (2003a) looked at district responses to teacher shortages between 1999 and 2002, they found that strategic approaches were rare. Their examination of data from the U.S. Department of Education's 1999-2000 Schools and Staffing Survey showed that only 4 percent of districts reported using intradistrict incentives to attract teachers to hard-to-staff schools, and only 10 percent of districts reported using targeted subject-area incentives. Interviews with 110 human resource directors revealed that nearly three fourths preferred across-the-board salary increases as a recruitment policy.

Murphy and DeArmond (2003a) recommend that districts remove organizational barriers to flexible and responsive recruitment policies and consider joining with other districts to create a regional human resource institution. Other literature shows that strategic alliances can yield creative solutions. In Colorado, for example, four rural school districts joined forces 10 years ago to establish a solution to the shortage (and expense) of foreign-language teachers for the districts' small schools. The districts created the state's first distance-learning network, which enabled the districts to hire a French teacher who used a "studio classroom" arrangement to instruct classes in all four districts simultaneously. Video monitors in the classrooms allowed the teacher to view all students in each classroom (Education Commission of the States, 2001).

Specific recruitment and retention practices. A broad, one-size-fits-all approach to recruitment and retention is not likely to produce the desired results (Murphy & DeArmond, 2003a). Efforts should be focused on specific schools or subjects that are particularly hard to staff. Building-level staff should be involved in the hiring process so a specific candidate can interact with potential future coworkers on a personal level (Liu, 2003).

Sustained recruitment and retention practices. Sustaining recruitment and retention efforts means regularly reevaluating targeted programs and adjusting them

accordingly. Induction programs and other initiatives should be formalized so they become part of the school culture. The literature implies (and occasionally states) that administrators may need training in how to support teachers and foster professional learning communities to aid retention (Ingersoll, 2001; Lemke, 1994). A strategic, specific, and sustained approach to retention may require reculturing—a "shift" in the way district and school professionals (1) view their jobs and (2) spend their time.

Ideally, responsibility for retaining high-quality teachers should be distributed among teachers, the principal, the superintendent, and state decision makers. Time should be set aside for professional collaboration and other important but not urgent matters that affect school climate and culture—including teacher retention, at least to some degree. The time challenge brings to light one of the ironies of rural school culture: In rural places, the pace of life is generally slower than in cities. But for rural educators, the pace of school life might seem speeded up due to multiple teaching assignments, heavy extracurricular responsibilities, and lack of support staff (extra hands).

Recruitment and retention practices rooted within the community. Recruiting and developing local talent is seen as a strategy with high potential for helping rural areas because it results in a pool of teaching candidates who are (1) already familiar with the rural lifestyle and (2) already rooted to the community by family or other connections. Comfort and connectedness within the rural community are especially important because these advantages can help beginning teachers overcome feelings of isolation. Collins (1999) pinpointed isolation as a major factor affecting rural teachers in his summary of rural-specific literature on the topic published between 1990 and 1999.

A national survey of rural superintendents in the United States (Schwartzbeck, 2003) confirms the necessity of addressing isolation as it relates to teacher recruitment and retention. Analysis of the survey's 896 responses (in a self-selected sample) identified low salaries, social isolation, and geographic isolation as the top three factors responsible for difficulties in attracting and retaining teachers. Urban and suburban teachers do not cite isolation as a factor in their decisions to leave, according to an analysis of national data by Richard Ingersoll (NCTAF, 2003, pp. 27, 37).

A distinguishing characteristic of effective rural retention, it appears, is its ability to capitalize on the power of "rootedness" within the community. For example, one study of special education teachers in a rural state showed that "leavers" and "stayers" rated their job satisfaction about equally (none were greatly satisfied), but the determining factor in whether a teacher changed jobs was rootedness to the community (Bornfield et al., 1997, p. 31). "The leavers . . . considered 'home' to be someplace other than where they worked" (p. 36). A study of Montana's smallest schools identified the personal/family sphere as having the greatest influence on teachers' decisions to accept employment and the community sphere as having the greatest influence on their decisions to stay. "Within-classroom" and "whole-school" spheres were less influential (Davis, 2002). Findings such as these have prompted many rural communities to employ "grow-your-own" strategies to develop teachers from the local pool of potential candidates.

The authors of a review of state and local efforts to recruit teachers, published by the U.S. Department of Education (Clewell et al., 2000), reported that "there is far more experimentation going on . . . than is being reported in the literature" and expressed

concern that valuable information about successful strategies was being lost because "evaluation results of model programs are not being shared . . . with other researchers and practitioners" (p. 71). Perhaps the most significant contribution of the Department review is a point not frequently mentioned in the rural-specific literature—the potential advantages of connecting state and local efforts to (1) collect and analyze data and (2) use these data collaboratively to develop programs that are responsive to specific local needs. Clewell and colleagues point out that local programs have the discrete information necessary to determine what actions will best address local needs. States, however, have the authority to enact policy changes (e.g., provision of incentives and reciprocal agreements about credential portability) that can hinder or support local efforts. Current state strategies that address teacher recruitment and retention include scholarship programs, loan and loan-forgiveness programs, salary increases, bonuses, tax credit/mortgage assistance, relocation assistance, and stipends (Education Commission of the States, 2002). Collaboration and cooperation among state and local education agencies could magnify the results of these efforts at both levels.

Conclusions

In rural districts, as in districts everywhere, some aspects of teacher recruitment and retention are beyond the immediate influence of education leaders: a local factory closing forces the math teacher to resign after her husband finds another factory job elsewhere, the science teacher moves to another state to care for an ailing parent, the special education teacher decides to pursue a nursing degree, the French teacher retires early. There will always be vacancies created by teachers who leave for personal and family reasons such as these. Likewise, one wonders how much can be done to stem the out-migration of young people (including young teachers) from many rural areas to the cities and suburbs.

Other aspects of teacher recruitment and retention, however, can be influenced by rural education leaders. Edvantia's review of the literature suggests that the following strategies hold the greatest promise for yielding the desired result—placing high-quality teachers in rural classrooms and keeping them there.

- **Base recruitment efforts on state and local data on teacher supply and demand.** Stakeholder groups should analyze data to identify trends and disaggregate data to determine what subjects or geographic areas need the greatest attention. When Oregon examined statewide data, for example, it became clear that some rural areas were having trouble recruiting elementary school teachers even though there was not a statewide shortage (Oregon University System, 2004).
- **Invest in "grow-your-own" initiatives to develop teachers.** Community members who are interested in teaching in local schools are more likely to stay in the community. Another advantage is their familiarity with local culture and challenges. Retention rates are especially high for paraprofessionals who already have experience in local schools. There are two categories of candidates: those already certified to teach and those who have the interest and potential but lack education credentials and certification. Related to the former group, a strategy

pursued in some rural districts is to assist current teachers in retraining for high-need subject areas. Attracting members of the latter group—secondary school students, community college students, education paraprofessionals, substitute teachers, and professionals in other fields—will require states to develop career pathways that accommodate the particular needs of nontraditional students, including financial aid. Such grow-your-own initiatives are especially attractive in rural areas because the candidates are more likely to desire a teaching position within the community. A common mistake, however, is failure to target the subject areas where the need is greatest.

- **Include all vital partners in collaborative efforts.** States and districts should ensure that their efforts are complementary. University teacher preparation programs are vital partners in teacher recruitment; community colleges can play an important role in developing nontraditional teaching candidates.
- **Encourage universities to customize teacher education programs.** Especially needed are programs that prepare prospective teachers for success in rural schools. Oregon universities have successfully recruited students from "shortage" fields (e.g., math, science, foreign languages) into teaching careers. Offering evening, weekend, or online courses can play a vital role in preparing nontraditional teaching candidates.
- **Offer targeted incentives.** As competition increases for teachers in high-demand subject areas, rural schools, which research has shown pay less than their suburban and urban counterparts, will be at an additional disadvantage if they cannot offer differential pay and perhaps other incentives.
- **Institute formal induction programs.** Research shows high-quality induction programs to be one of the most effective ways to protect a district's investment in a new teacher. The best programs start new teachers with a reduced teaching and extracurricular load and formally match them to an expert teacher-mentor. Expert teachers who mentor new teachers should be rewarded for their willingness to assume such responsibilities.
- **Offer incentives for staying.** States and/or school districts might consider tying bonuses, student-loan-forgiveness programs, and other incentives to staying on past the first year.
- **Improve the school culture and working conditions.** Improving the school's culture and working conditions can make teachers want to stay. Additionally, research shows that improvements in school culture can lead to improved student achievement, which can, in turn, make the school a more attractive place to teach.
- **Involve the community.** The community can play an important role in welcoming new teachers. The community is also a potential source for teachers who are already rooted to the area and therefore more likely to stay.
- **Invest in school leadership development.** Principals' training does not always prepare them to nurture school structures and cultures that support teachers in

important ways. Ongoing professional development for principals is just as important as it is for teachers.

Rural school leaders need access to the best available information and data on teacher recruitment and retention, and they need to approach the task in a manner that is strategic, specific, and sustained.

Survey of the National Landscape

Methodology

Participants. A total of 597 superintendents from a random selection of 1,565 rural school districts completed the survey with valid data and returned the questionnaire during the summer of 2005, yielding an overall response rate of 38%.[4] The responses of these 597 superintendents reflect the recruiting and retention practices of approximately 1,900 schools serving more than 718,000 elementary, middle school, and high school students from rural areas not located near an urban area (National Center for Education Statistics [NCES] locale code 7) and rural areas located near an urban area (locale code 8).

Measures. The Rural School Districts: Recruitment and Retention Practices questionnaire (see Appendix A) is a brief assessment tool used to obtain information about recruitment and retention strategies, including particular difficulties and challenges as well as successful practices used by rural districts for both recruitment and retention. Items on the questionnaire were developed based on the review of the literature.

Recruitment items focused on the extent to which the particular district had difficulty staffing particular grades (e.g., upper elementary, middle school, high school), specific challenges to teacher recruitment (e.g., geographic isolation, low/uncompetitive wages, and working conditions), and the district's reliance on particular methods for recruiting new teachers (e.g., targeted incentives, regular evaluation of recruitment strategies, offering competitive salaries). These items were rated on a Likert-type scale, ranging from 1 "Not at all" to 6 "A great deal". Specific strategies used to find recruits (e.g., job fairs, personal contacts, Internet advertising) were assessed using a 3-point scale, ranging from 1 "Never" to 3 "Frequently". A final question asked respondents to indicate the extent to which districts relied on each of a number of strategies (e.g., hire certified teachers, qualified teachers, retired teachers, and increase class sizes), using a 6-point scale ranging from 1 "Not at all" to 6 "Extremely".

Retention items were assessed using a 6-point scale ranging from 1 "Not at all" to 6 "Extremely" and measured the extent to which specific challenges to retaining teachers were found (e.g., isolation, school environment and culture) and about the district's dependence on retention strategies (e.g., instituting formal induction programs for new teachers, offering formal mentoring programs, providing best possible working conditions).

[4]A total of 603 surveys were received. Four school districts had undergone some type of change that no longer qualified them for participation in the project (e.g., merging with other districts, non-operating status) and one school district returned 2 copies of the questionnaire.

A number of open-ended questions asked respondents to (a) provide subject areas and specializations that represented the biggest challenges for recruitment in their district, (b) offer additional recruitment and retention strategies that were most beneficial and effective, and (c) offer reasons why teachers who are newly hired tend to leave their positions within 1-2 years or stay in the district.

School district information was also assessed. This included the type of locale (e.g., rural and not located near an urban area, rural and located near an urban area), the number of schools in the district, the number of children served by the district, and the percentages of students who qualify for free or reduced-price lunch. District information was also collected on the number of full-time teaching positions, the number of current vacancies, and the percentages of teaching positions that need to be filled every year. Finally, the percentage of staff within the district who meet "highly qualified" requirements of the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) were also assessed.

Procedure. A random selection of 1,565 school districts was chosen from the universe of locale code 7 (rural, not located near an urban area) and locale code 8 (rural, located near an urban area) and downloaded from the National Center for Education Statistics Web site using the Common Core of Data Build-a-Table tool. Superintendents from each district in the sample received a letter of introduction to the project, which stated the overall purpose of the study, and an invitation to participate in a project on teacher recruitment and retention practices in rural school districts throughout the United States. Participants were also informed that their responses would be presented anonymously and in aggregate form and would be useful in discerning which tactics for teacher recruitment and retention are working best for rural school districts and what shortfalls in filling vacancies they continue to face. Approximately 1 to 2 weeks later, participants were sent the questionnaire and a postage-paid return envelope. If the survey was not received within 1 to 2 weeks, staff sent a reminder postcard, an additional survey, and a final reminder postcard (Mangione, 1995).

Analyses. Descriptive statistics, which include the sample size (*N*), mean (*M*), and standard deviations (*SD*),were calculated for the total sample of respondents and according to the district locale (e.g., rural, located near an urban area or rural, not located near an urban area). Independent Samples t tests were also conducted to examine differential recruitment and retention strategies, as well as difficulties and challenges between those rural districts that are and are not located near an urban area. In the event that the two groups were not assumed to have equal variances (also known as homogeneity of variance and indicated by a significant Levene's Test), corrected values for the degrees of freedom are presented. Given the number of analyses presented, a more conservative p value of .01 was used to determine significance.

Results

Descriptive information from the 597 participating superintendents is presented in Table 1, which presents the total and average numbers of schools and students represented by each superintendent. Rural districts located near an urban area reported significantly more schools per district, $t(206)=2.63$, $p=.001$, and more students per

school, $t(182)=3.36$, $p=.001$, than those districts not located near an urban area. There were also significant differences in the percentages of students who qualified for free or reduced-price lunch by district. Districts not located near an urban center had significantly higher percentages of students qualifying for free and reduced-price lunches, $t(260)=-5.09$, $p=.000$, than those districts located near urban areas. See Figure 1 for a depiction of these results.

Table 1.

Descriptive Statistics for the Number of Schools and Students

	Schools Per District				Students Per District			
	N	*M*	*SD*	Total	*N*	*M*	*SD*	Total
Total Sample	595	3.21	4.19	1,907	595	1207.05	2971.00	718,192
Rural, Located Near Urban Area	170	4.12	6.03	700	172	2128.41	4983.93	366,086
Rural, Not Located Near Urban Area	425	2.84	3.11	1,207	423	832.40	1368.38	352,106

Tables 2 through 4 present descriptive information on the full-time teaching force and vacancies for the total sample and by district. Significant differences were found for the number of full-time teaching positions by district. Those districts located near an urban area had significantly more teaching positions ($t(178)=3.25$, $p=.001$). There were no significant differences in the percentages of vacancies reported between the two types of rural districts ($t(587)=.108$, $p=.914$) and the percentages of positions that need to be filled each year ($t(549)=-1.30$, $p=.195$).

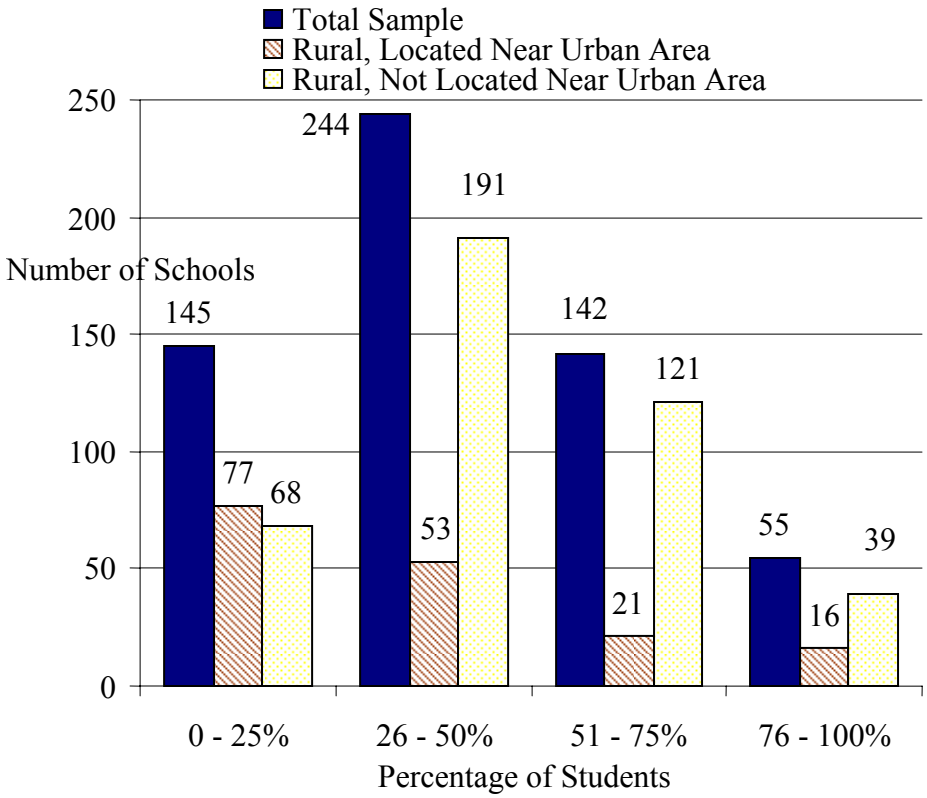


Figure 1. Percentages of Students Qualifying for Free and Reduced-Price Lunch.

Table 2.

Average Number of Full-time Positions and Vacancies

	Total			Rural, Located Near Urban Area			Rural, Not Located Near Urban Area		
	N	*M*	*SD*	*N*	*M*	*SD*	*N*	*M*	*SD*
Full-time Teaching Positions in District	592	87.0	213.3	172	151.9	365.9	420	60.5	84.1
Vacancies in District Teaching Force	593	3.3	13.9	172	6.2	24.8	420	2.1	4.00

Table 3.

Computed Vacancies Overall and by District[5]

	Total Sample		Rural, Located Near Urban Area		Rural, Not Located Near Urban Area	
	N	Percent (%)	N	Percent (%)	N	Percent (%)
Less than 10%	529	89.8	151	87.8	378	90.6
10 - 20%	36	6.1	14	8.1	22	5.3
21 - 30%	15	2.5	4	2.3	11	2.6
31 - 40%	3	0.5	2	1.2	1	0.2
41 - 50%	2	0.3	0	0.0	2	0.5
51 - 60%	1	0.2	0	0.0	1	0.2
71 - 80%	1	0.2	0	0.0	1	0.2
Greater than 90%	2	0.3	1	0.6	1	0.2

[5]This was calculated by dividing the total number of vacancies in the district by the total number of teaching positions in the district.

Table 4.

Percentages of Teaching Positions Needing to be Filled Each Year Overall and by District Locale

	Total Sample		Rural, Located Near Urban Area		Rural, Not Located Near Urban Area	
	N	Percent	*N*	Percent	*N*	Percent
Less than 6%	294	53.4	83	53.5	211	53.3
6 - 10%	178	32.3	47	30.3	131	33.1
11 - 15%	46	8.3	20	12.9	26	6.6
16 - 20%	15	2.7	3	1.9	12	3.0
21 - 25%	8	1.5	0	0.0	8	2.0
26 - 30%	2	0.4	1	0.6	1	0.3
31 - 35%	0	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0
36 - 40%	2	0.4	1	0.6	1	0.3
41 - 45%	0	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0
46 - 50%	0	1.0	0	0.0	0	0.0
Greater than 50%	6	1.1	0	0.0	6	1.5

Descriptive information on the number of highly qualified teachers, according to the requirements of NCLB, is presented in Figure 2. However, there were no significant differences between the two groups on the percentages of staff on requirements related to having their certification ($t(569)=-.84$, $p=.400$), bachelor's degree or higher ($t(563)=.38$, $p=.702$), or proficiency in the subject area taught $t(540)=.08$, $p=.938$. As shown in Table 5, districts reported having the most difficulty with resource professionals (24.6%), math, business, and economics (24.2%), and science (22.6%).

Table 5.

Subject Areas and Specializations Representing the Biggest Challenge to Rural Districts

Category	Number of Responses	Percent
Resource Professionals (Special education, ESL, counselors, vocation, disability specialists)	384	24.6
Math, Business, and Economics	377	24.2
Science	353	22.6
Language Arts (e.g., foreign language, English, journalism, reading)	152	9.7
Fine Arts (e.g., music, art)	137	8.8
Vocational Education (including agriculture, industrial arts, computer technology, shop, and home economics)	53	3.4
All Subjects	33	2.1
Social studies (e.g., history, government, psychology, diversity, communication)	26	1.7
Physical education (including coaching), Health, and Family/Consumer Science	25	1.6
Library/Library media	14	0.9
None or N/A	7	0.4

Note. A total of 1561 responses was recorded.

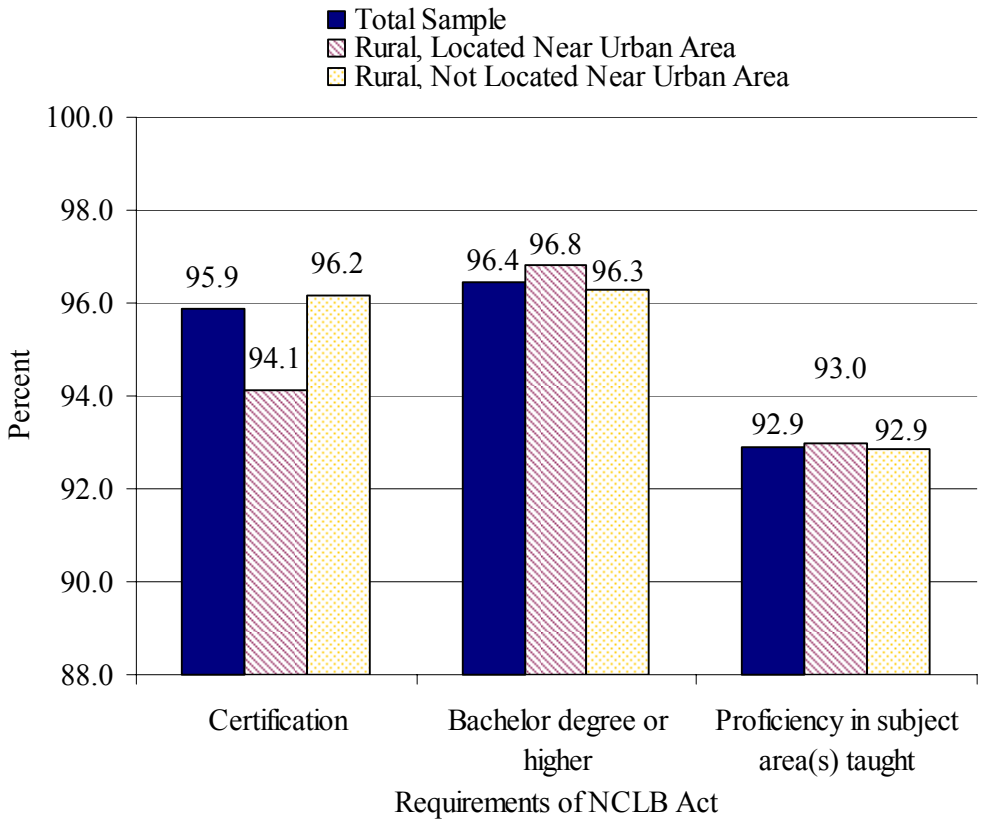


Figure 2. Percentages of Staff Meeting the "Highly Qualified" Requirements of the No Child Left Behind Act.

Recruitment difficulties and challenges. Figure 3 presents the percentages of districts who reported great difficulty in staffing the different grade levels. Rural schools reported much more difficulty in staffing high school positions (28.9%), followed by middle school positions (10.8%), and the least difficulty filling early (1.6%) and upper (.7%) elementary positions. This represents a common pattern across rural districts with no significant differences between rural districts near an urban area and those districts not located near an urban area for early childhood ($t(535)=-.21$, $p=.837$), early elementary ($t(581)=.24$, $p=.812$), upper elementary ($t(579)=1.02$, $p=.307$), middle school ($t(548)=1.09$, $p=.277$), and high school ($t(500)=-1.63$, $p=.104$).

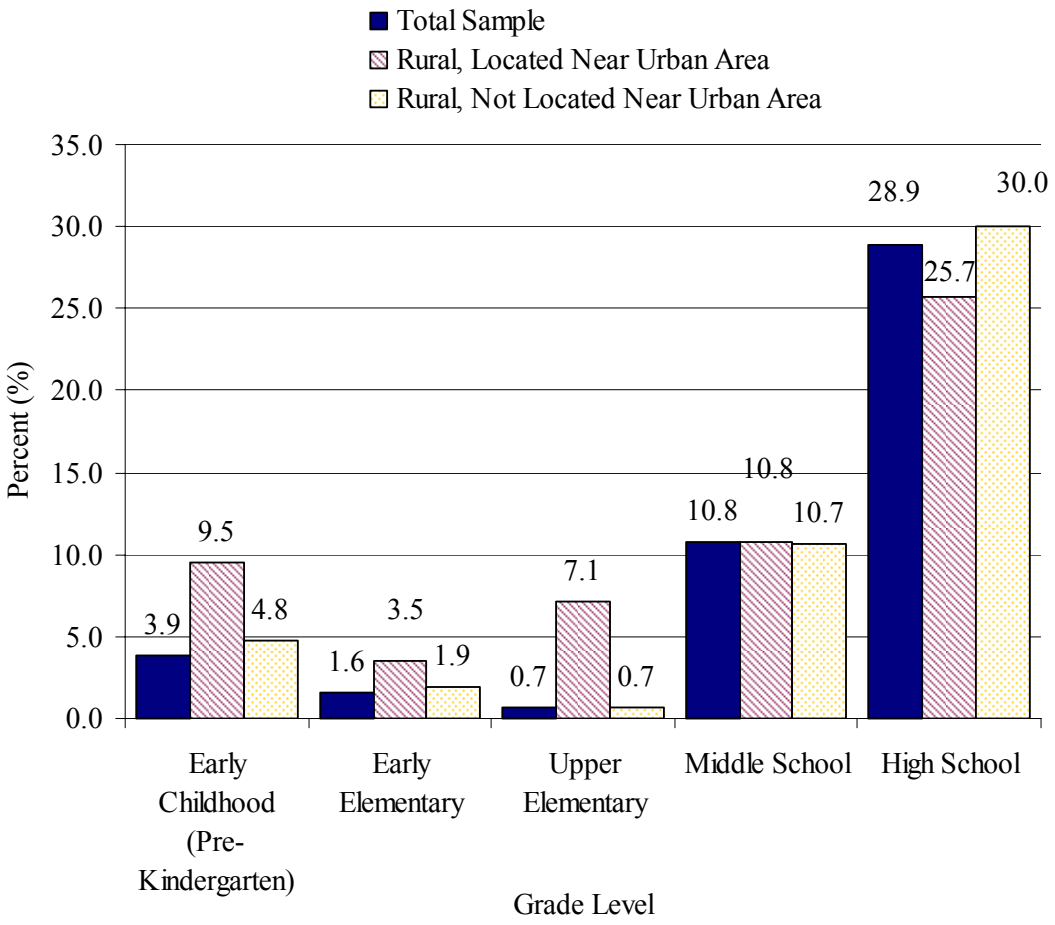


Figure 3. Percentages of Districts Having a Great Deal of Difficulty Staffing Specific Grade Levels.

As shown in Figure 4, superintendents reported on their districts' greatest challenges in recruiting new teachers. Overall, the most reported challenges included geographic isolation (32.1%), social isolation (27.6%), being close to higher paying districts (26.8%) and low/uncompetitive salaries (26.2%). Respondents were less likely to indicate NCLB certification requirements (12.9%), working conditions (5.2%), and school environment and culture (4.7%) as challenges to recruitment.

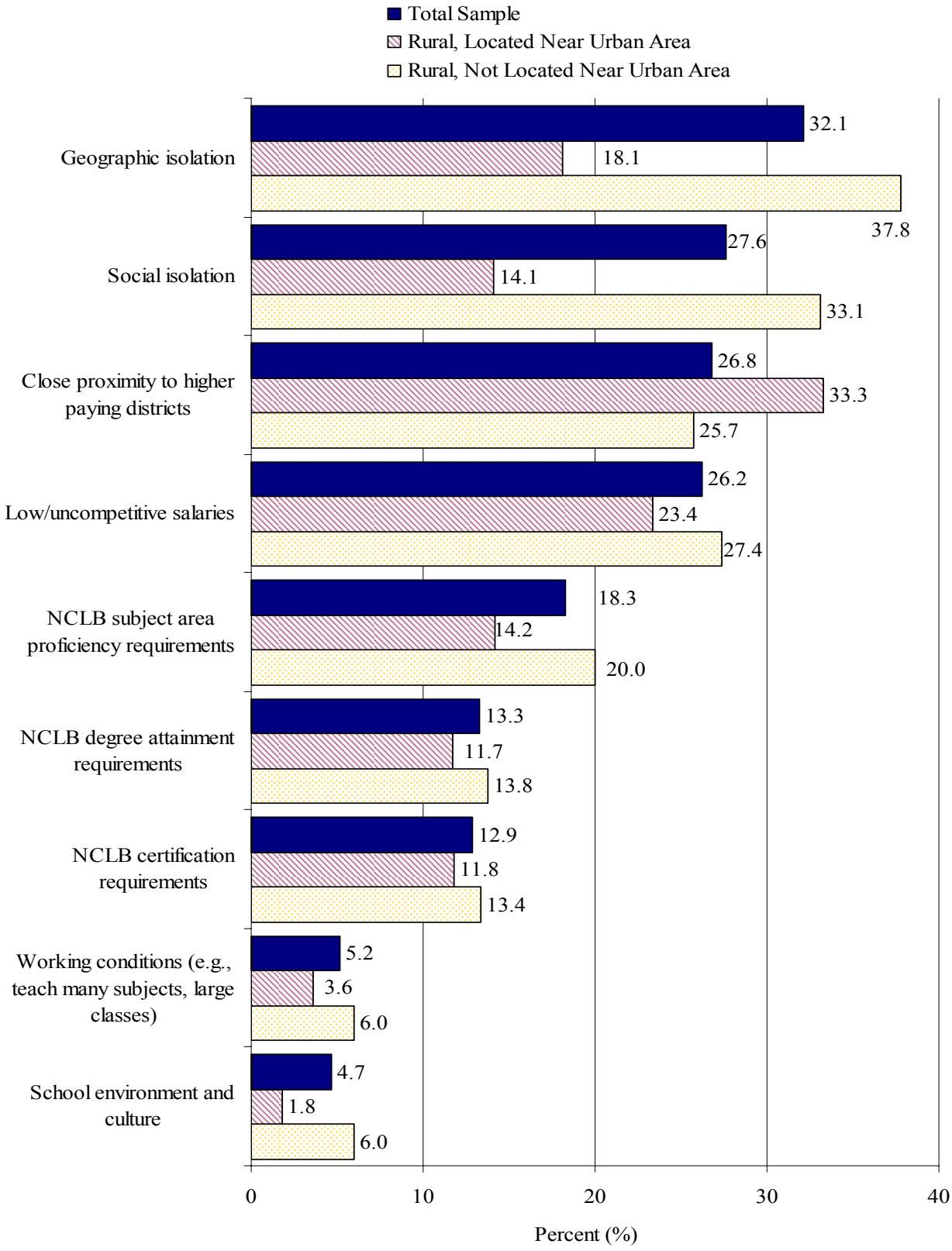


Figure 4. Percentages of Districts Reporting Specific Factors as being a Great Challenge to Teacher Recruitment.

Comparisons between school districts located near an urban area and those not located near an urban area indicate different challenges to recruitment. Districts not located near an urban area were more likely to report geographic isolation ($t(589)=-6.31$, $p=.000$), social isolation ($t(588)=-6.33$, $p=.000$), and school environment and culture ($t(588)=-3.59$, $p=.000$), with a trend indicating that the overall working conditions ($t(587)=-2.42$, $p=.016$) were also a challenge to recruitment. There were no significant differences between the two groups on the extent to which NCLB-related requirements (certification, $t(585)=-.60$, $p=.549$; degree attainment, $t(586)=-.91$, $p=.363$; subject area proficiency, $t(582)=-.43$, $p=.668$, proximity of higher paying districts $t(282)=.626$, $p=.532$), and uncompetitive salaries, $t(589)=-2.14$, $p=.030$) were a challenge to teacher recruitment.

Strategies

The most frequent methods of finding recruits for teaching positions included statewide advertising (61.1%), Web site or Internet advertising (58.0%), local advertising (57.6%), and personal contacts or networking (43.1%), as shown in Figure 5. The least used methods were job fairs (12.8%), out-of-state or national advertising (11.3%), and job banks (8.9%). Comparisons between district type indicate that districts not located near an urban area were significantly more likely to use statewide advertising ($t(589)=-3.55$, $p=.000$), and out-of-state advertising ($t(379)=-3.17$, $p=.002$) than those located near urban areas. Those districts located near an urban area were more likely to use unsolicited résumés or references ($t(304)=3.51$, $p=.001$) than those not located near an urban area. There were no differences in methods by district with regard to job fairs ($t(584)=1.77$, $p=.077$), local advertising ($t(587)=1.20$, $p=.231$), Web site or Internet advertising ($t(588)=-.582$, $p=.561$), job banks ($t(572)=-.31$, $p=.756$), personal contacts ($t(587)=1.84$, $p=.066$), references from other districts ($t(588)=.31$, $p=.756$), and recruitment through colleges and universities ($t(589)=.50$, $p=.615$).

Respondents were also asked to report the three most fruitful strategies for finding recruits, as presented in Figure 6. These included statewide advertising (18%), personal contacts or networking (18%), Web site or Internet advertising (17%), and local advertising (17%). The least fruitful strategies included unsolicited résumés or references (5%), out-of-state or national advertising (2%), and job banks (2%).

Additional questions addressed the reliance on different methods used to recruit teachers (see Figure 7). The most commonly used strategies were including building-level staff in the recruitment and hiring process (35.2%), promoting the advantage of teaching and living in the area (35.0%), and offering competitive salaries (22.4%). The least commonly used strategies for recruitment included offering targeted incentives for hard-to-staff schools or subject areas (4.4%), offering housing or relocation assistance (4.1%), and collecting state/local data on teacher supply and demand (1.7%). Districts located near an urban area were more likely to offer competitive salaries ($t(592)=3.16$, $p=.002$) and include building-level staff in the recruitment and hiring process ($t(591)=2.92$, $p=.004$), with a trend indicating these districts also promoted benefits to a greater degree ($t(592)=2.43$, $p=.015$). Districts not located in urban areas were more likely to offer housing or relocation assistance ($t(427)=-3.05$, $p=.002$). There were no differences in other types of recruitment strategies used between the two groups.

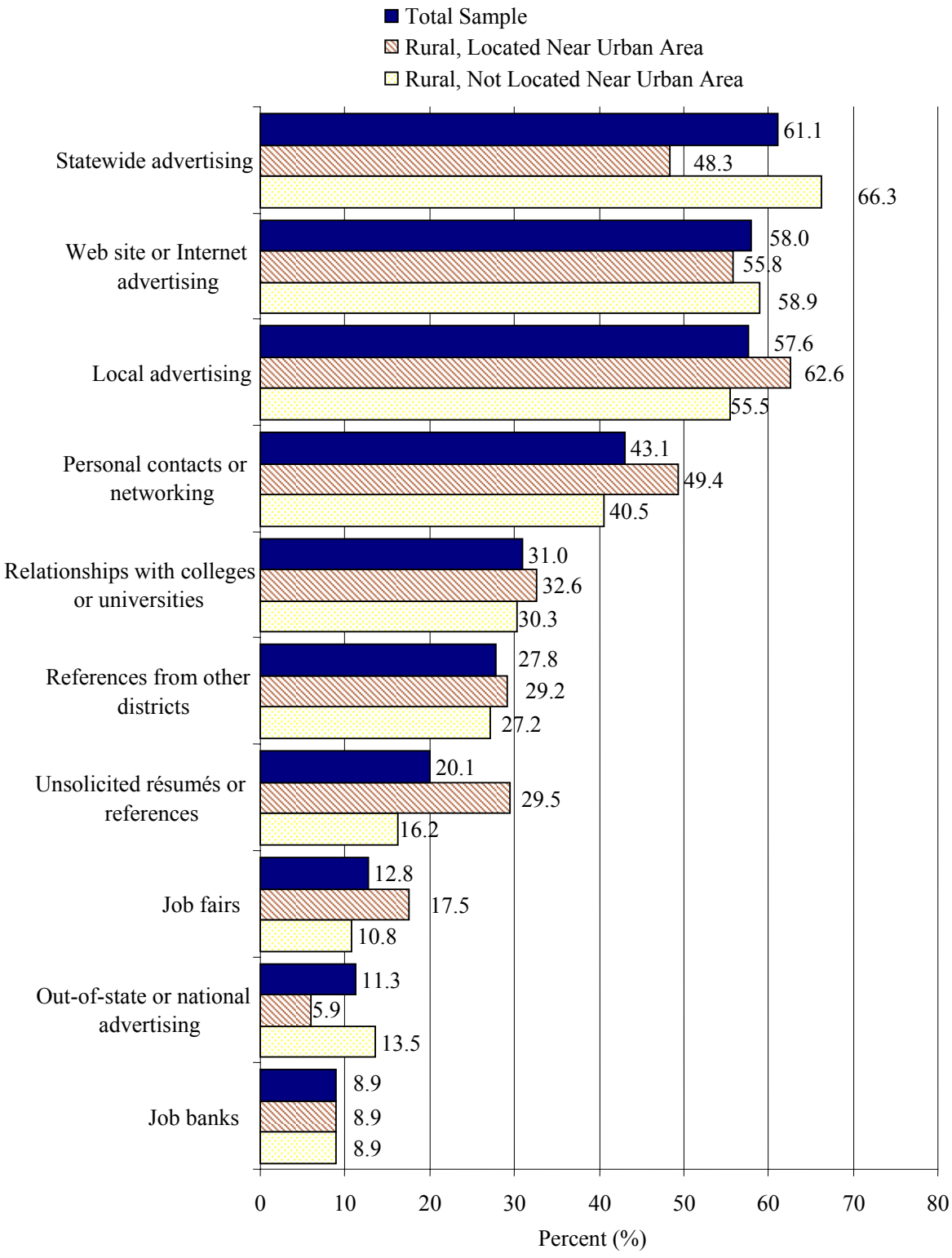


Figure 5. Percentages of Districts Using Most Frequent Methods of Finding Recruits.

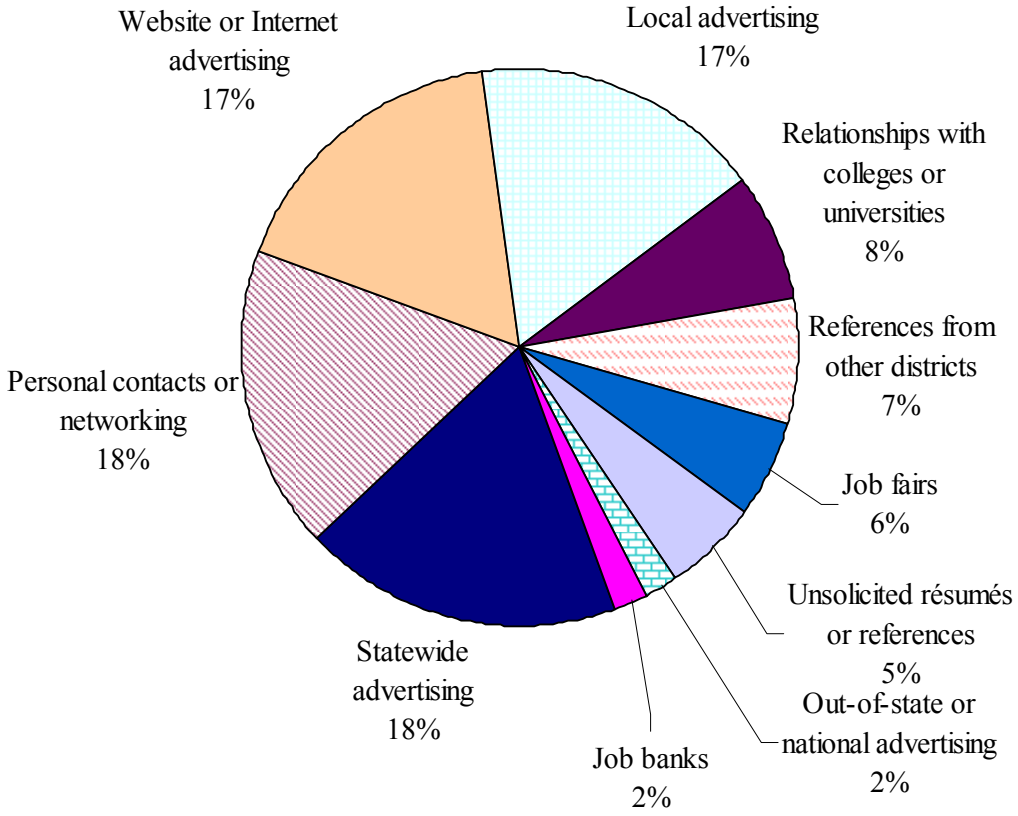


Figure 6. Percentages of Districts Reporting Most Fruitful Contact Strategies for Finding Recruits.

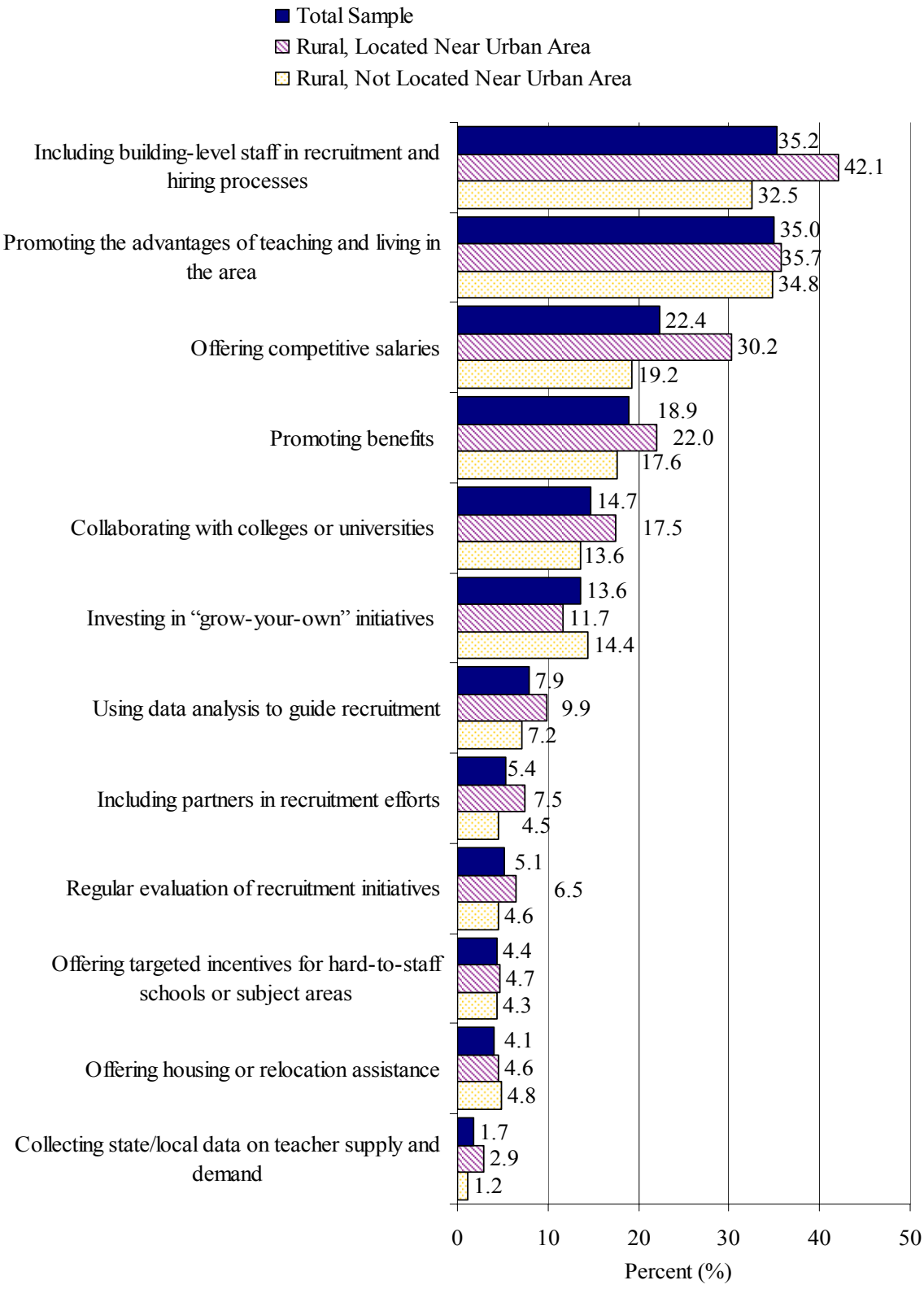


Figure 7. Percentages of Districts Relying on Particular Strategies for Teacher Recruitment.

Successful Practices

Superintendents were also asked to identify the three most successful recruitment strategies for their district, shown in Figure 8. These included including building-level staff in recruitment and hiring processes (18%), promoting the advantages of teaching and living in the area (17%), and offering competitive salaries (16%). The least successful recruitment strategies were offering housing or relocation assistance (2%), collecting state/local data on teacher supply and demand (1%), and using data analysis to guide recruitment (1%).

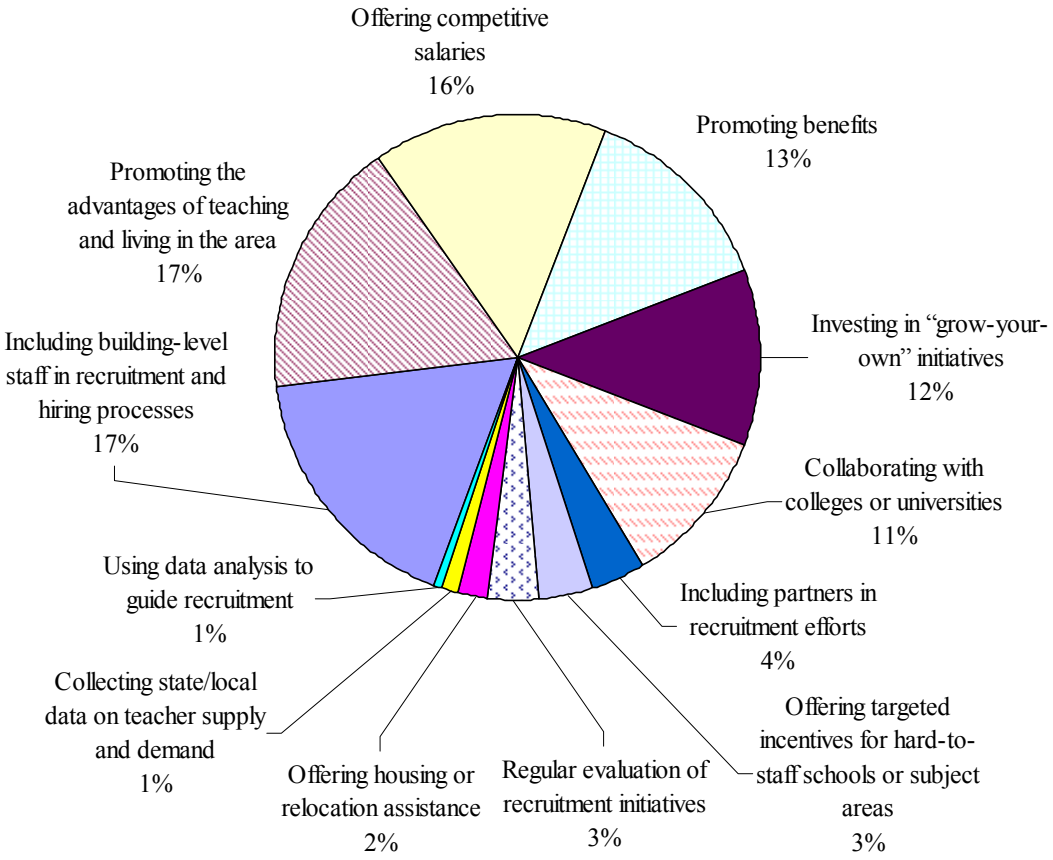


Figure 8. Percentages of Districts Reporting Strategies as Most Useful for Teacher Recruitment.

When asked about alternative recruitment strategies that might be beneficial to other districts (presented in Table 6), the strategies not mentioned above were promoting a positive community/school environment (31.4%), general advertising and collaboration (24.9%), and offering benefits (21.6%).

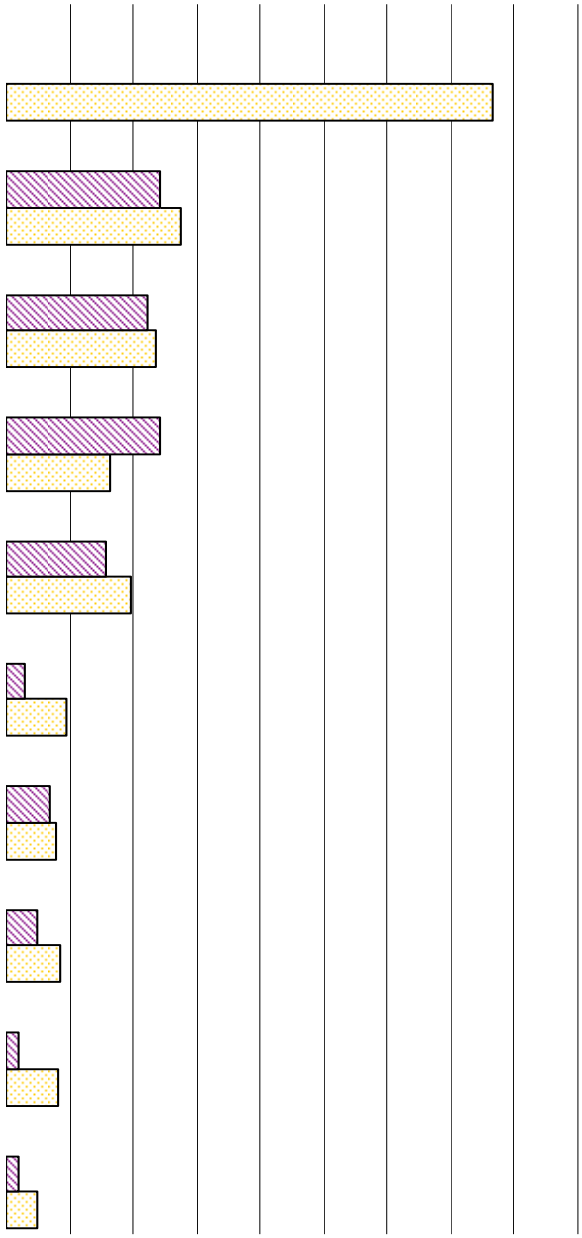
Table 6.

Alternative Recruitment Strategies Proposed by District Respondents

Strategy Category	Number of Responses	Percent
Promoting positive community/school environment	58	31.4
General advertising and collaboration	46	24.9
Benefits (e.g., stipends, opportunities for advancement, and creative benefit packages)	40	21.6
Retention within the school (e.g., mentoring programs, the use of exit interviews) and within the community (e.g., encouraging high school graduates to return after college	22	11.9
Alternative recruitment approaches (e.g., personal contact/investment, making application process easier, using aggressive recruitment)	19	10.3

Note. A total of 185 responses were recorded.

Respondents were asked about the most common methods used to fill vacancies present in the district at the beginning of the school year (shown in Figure 9). Overall, superintendents reported vacancies would be filled by hiring qualified teachers (79.5%), hiring teachers with certification in progress (26.5%), and hiring teachers with temporary licenses (23.3%). Teachers who acted as substitutes (18.8%) or were retired (18.3%) were the least of ten mentioned ways to fill vacancies. Districts also reported increasing class sizes (7.3%), reducing the number of classes offered (6.5%), or assigning administrators to teach classes (4.1%) as ways to deal with teacher shortages. Districts located near an urban area were significantly more likely than districts not located near an urban area to hire retired teachers ($t(493)=-3.43$, $p=.001$), with trends suggesting these districts also tended to reduce the number of courses offered ($t(306)=-2.59$, $p=.010$) and/or increase the number of classes assigned to current teachers ($t(318)=-2.58$, $p=.010$) to fill vacancies at the beginning of the year.



AEL & NASBE

Rural School Districts: Recruitment & Retention Practices

The purpose of this questionnaire is to gather information about recruitment and retention challenges and best practices in rural school districts throughout the United States. Your responses will contribute valuable information to the national search for effective practices in rural education.

Please read each question carefully and give honest responses. For questions that ask you to give a rating, please circle the number that most closely corresponds with the response for your district.

1. **How many full time teaching positions are there currently in your district?** . . . . . _____

2. **How many vacancies are there currently in your district's teaching force?** . . . . . _____

3. **What percentage of teaching positions in your district needs to be filled each year?** . . _____%

4. **What percentage of your district's professional staff currently meets the "highly qualified" requirements of the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act? Please give your best estimate of the approximate percentage for each.**
   a. Certification? ..... _____%
   b. Bachelor's degree or higher? ..... _____%
   c. Proficiency in subject area(s) taught? ..... _____%

5. **Which three (3) subject areas or specializations represent the biggest challenges for your district when it comes to hiring highly qualified teachers? (Please list up to three.)**
   a. _____
   b. _____
   c. _____

RECRUITMENT

6. **How much difficulty (if any) does your district have in staffing the following grade levels:**

	Not at all		Some			A great deal
a. Early childhood (pre-kindergarten)	1	2	3	4	5	6
b. Early elementary	1	2	3	4	5	6
c. Upper elementary	1	2	3	4	5	6
d. Middle school	1	2	3	4	5	6
e. High school	1	2	3	4	5	6

7. **Please rate the extent to which each of the following factors is a challenge for recruiting teachers in your district:**

	Not at all		Some			A great deal
a. Low/uncompetitive salaries	1	2	3	4	5	6
b. Geographic isolation	1	2	3	4	5	6
c. Social isolation	1	2	3	4	5	6

d. School environment and culture	1	2	3	4	5	6
e. Working conditions (e.g., teach many subjects, large classes)	1	2	3	4	5	6
f. NCLB certification requirements	1	2	3	4	5	6
g. NCLB degree attainment requirements	1	2	3	4	5	6
h. NCLB subject area proficiency requirements	1	2	3	4	5	6
i. Close proximity to higher paying districts	1	2	3	4	5	6

CONTINUED

8. How do you find recruits for teaching positions in your district?

	Never	Sometimes	Frequently
a. Job fairs	1	2	3
b. Local advertising	1	2	3
c. Statewide advertising	1	2	3
d. Out-of-state or national advertising	1	2	3
e. Website or Internet advertising	1	2	3
f. Job banks	1	2	3
g. Personal contacts or networking	1	2	3
h. References from other districts	1	2	3
i. Relationships with colleges or universities	1	2	3
j. Unsolicited résumés or references	1	2	3
k. Other (please list): _____	1	2	3

9. Which of these contact strategies have been most fruitful? (Please indicate choices by letter.)

(1) _____ (2) _____ (3) _____ (Other) _____

10. Please rate the extent to which your district relies on each of the following strategies in teacher recruitment efforts:

	Not at all			Some		A great deal
a. Investing in "grow-your-own" initiatives (e.g., helping paraprofessionals earn certification)	1	2	3	4	5	6
b. Offering targeted incentives for hard-to-staff schools or subject areas	1	2	3	4	5	6
c. Offering competitive salaries	1	2	3	4	5	6
d. Promoting benefits (including insurance, daycare assistance, and/or tuition assistance)	1	2	3	4	5	6
e. Offering housing or relocation assistance	1	2	3	4	5	6
f. Collecting state/local data on teacher supply and demand	1	2	3	4	5	6
g. Using data analysis to guide recruitment	1	2	3	4	5	6
h. Including partners in recruitment efforts	1	2	3	4	5	6
i. Regular evaluation of recruitment initiatives	1	2	3	4	5	6
j. Collaborating with colleges or universities (e.g., to customize teacher education programs)	1	2	3	4	5	6
k. Including building-level staff in recruitment and hiring processes	1	2	3	4	5	6
l. Promoting the advantages of teaching and living in the area	1	2	3	4	5	6
m. Other (please list): _____	1	2	3	4	5	6

11. Which of these recruitment strategies have been most successful? (Please indicate choices by letter.)

(1) _____ (2) _____ (3) _____ (Other) _____

12. What other recruitment strategies (other than those listed above) has your district tried that you think might be beneficial for other rural school districts in the United States?

a. _____

_____

b. _____

_____

c. _____

_____

(Please include additional sheets or descriptions if necessary)

13. When there are vacancies in your district at the beginning of a school year, how lik... district (or schools within the district) will rely upon each of the following actions to ... vacancies?

CONTINUED

N/A This item is not applicable for my district. (Please skip to the next question.)

	Not at all			Somewhat		Extremely
a. Hire certified, qualified teachers	1	2	3	4	5	6
b. Hire substitute teachers	1	2	3	4	5	6
c. Hire teachers with temporary licenses	1	2	3	4	5	6
d. Hire teachers with certification in progress	1	2	3	4	5	6
e. Hire retired teachers	1	2	3	4	5	6
f. Increase class sizes	1	2	3	4	5	6
g. Reduce the number of courses offered	1	2	3	4	5	6
h. Increase the number of classes assigned to current teachers	1	2	3	4	5	6
i. Increase the number of teachers' aides	1	2	3	4	5	6
j. Assign administrators to teach classes	1	2	3	4	5	6
k. Other (please list): _____	1	2	3	4	5	6

RETENTION

14. Please rate the extent to which each of the following factors is a challenge in *retaining* teachers in your district:

	Not at all			Some		A great deal
a. Low/uncompetitive salaries	1	2	3	4	5	6
b. Geographic isolation	1	2	3	4	5	6
c. Social isolation	1	2	3	4	5	6
d. School environment and culture	1	2	3	4	5	6
e. Working conditions (e.g., teach many subjects, large classes)	1	2	3	4	5	6
f. NCLB certification requirements	1	2	3	4	5	6
g. NCLB degree attainment requirements	1	2	3	4	5	6
h. NCLB subject area proficiency requirements	1	2	3	4	5	6
i. Close proximity to higher paying districts	1	2	3	4	5	6

15. Please rate the extent to which your district relies on each of the following strategies for *retaining* teachers:

	Not at all			Some		A great deal
a. Instituting formal induction programs for new teachers	1	2	3	4	5	6
b. Offering formal mentoring programs for new teachers	1	2	3	4	5	6
c. Offering other support for teachers (e.g., administrative support, appreciation programs)	1	2	3	4	5	6
d. Offering incentives for staying on past the 1st year	1	2	3	4	5	6
e. Creating a positive school culture	1	2	3	4	5	6
f. Providing the best possible working conditions	1	2	3	4	5	6
g. Using technology for mentoring, professional development	1	2	3	4	5	6
h. Involving communities to welcome or support new teachers	1	2	3	4	5	6
i. Investing in leadership development/shared leadership throughout the schools	1	2	3	4	5	6
j. Offering increased salaries or raises	1	2	3	4	5	6
k. Offering improved benefits	1	2	3	4	5	6
l. Offering tuition/other assistance in obtaining full certification	1	2	3	4	5	6
m. Providing professional development opportunities	1	2	3	4	5	6
n. Regular evaluation process regarding teacher retention	1	2	3	4	5	6
o. Other (please list): _____	1	2	3	4	5	6

16. Which of these retention efforts (listed in the previous items) have been most successful? (Please indicate choices by letter.)

CONTINUED

(1) _____ (2) _____ (3) _____ (Other) _____

17. What other retention strategies has your district tried that you think might be beneficial for other rural school districts in the United States?

a. _____

b. _____

c. _____

(Please include additional sheets or descriptions if necessary)

18. Thinking about teachers who leave the district shortly after they are hired (within a year or two), what are the typical reasons they do not stay? List up to three reasons, if applicable.

a. _____

b. _____

c. _____

19. Thinking about teachers who stay in the district, what are their typical reasons for doing so? List up to three reasons, if applicable.

a. _____

b. _____

c. _____

DISTRICT DEMOGRAPHICS

Which code best describes the locale of your district (please select only one):

(1) Large City
(2) Mid-size City
(3) Urban Fringe of Large City
(4) Urban Fringe of Mid-size City
(5) Large Town
(6) Small Town
(7) Rural, not located near an urban area
(8) Rural, located near an urban area

How many schools are included in your district? . . . . . ._____

Approximately how many children do the schools in your district serve? . . . . . ._____

Approximately what percentage of children in your district qualify for free and reduced-price lunch?
_____%

Thank you for your time and insights!

Please use the included reply envelope to return your completed questionnaire,
or send your completed questionnaire to AEL at:
P.O. Box 1348
Charleston, WV 25325-1348
Attn: Georgia Hughes

All information and data gathered in this survey will be analyzed and reported at the aggregate level. We will not associate your responses with you or your district. Neither you nor your district will be identified by name in any reports resulting from this survey.

If you have any questions or concerns about your rights as a participant in this research, please contact Dr. Merrill Meehan, Chair of the AEL IRB (800-624-9120, ext. 5432 or meehanm@ael.org).
Other questions may be directed to Georgia Hughes at AEL (800-624-9120, ext. 5413).

Thank you for responding to this survey about teacher recruitment and retention practices in rural school districts throughout the nation!

We might like to contact some respondents to this survey to get other information and insights about how rural school districts are meeting teacher recruitment and retention challenges and other efforts related to the NCLB legislation.

May we contact you about your experiences and opinions? If so, please tell us how we can best contact you:

District: _____

Name: _____

Phone: _____

E-mail: _____

Address 1: _____

Address 2: _____

City, State: _____

Zip: _____

Signature _____

My signature on this form indicates that I have read and understand the information provided to me on the included information sheet concerning the follow up telephone interviews. By signing, I further indicate that I am willing to have AEL researchers contact me. I realize that I my decline to participate in the interview when AEL staff members contact me or that I may cease participation at any time during the interview.

This sheet will be separated from your questionnaire when it arrives in our office. We will take every reasonable precaution to protect the confidentiality of your questionnaire responses by keeping your name and contact information separate.

Thank you!

National Survey of Approaches to Rural Teacher Recruitment & Retention

If you are agree to participate in a follow-up telephone interview, you need to know:

AEL staff members, partners, and consultants are examining teacher recruitment and retention practices in rural school districts. Research partners include Michael Hill, senior director for the Center for Policy Studies in Rural Education at the National Association of State Boards of Education; Patricia Hammer, AEL director of communications and policy services; and Georgia Hughes, AEL Research and Evaluation Specialist.

The purpose of this research study is to learn more about what tactics for teacher recruitment and retention are working best for rural school districts and what shortfalls in filling vacancies they continue to face. We are seeking your input and additional feedback because, as a rural district leader, we believe you have valuable information that will contribute to a more detailed understanding of the topic.

If you agree to participate in a follow up telephone interview, you will be asked to respond to interview questions related to teacher recruitment and retention. The interview should last for approximately 20minutes. There are no known risks associated with this project that are greater than those ordinarily encountered in daily life.

You will not receive direct compensation for participating in this research. However, the knowledge developed through this research study – including information and insight you provide – is expected to help state, federal, and district policy makers and decision makers to better understand challenges and solutions rural district administrators are facing and finding.

All information gathered through this study will be reported at the aggregate level; at no time and in no way will your name or the name of your school or district be reported or associated with the data. AEL will take all reasonable precautions to protect the confidentiality of your responses, including the following procedures: coding your identity and keeping your name and all identifying information in a locked filing cabinet separate from your responses; storing electronic data in restricted access files or on disks in a locked cabinet; storing all paper copies of interview(s) in a locked filing cabinet. Raw data will be stored for three years, after which time electronic files will be erased and paper files will be shredded and disposed of appropriately. The only persons who will have access to your verbatim comments and notes from the interview(s) will be Georgia Hughes and Patricia Hammer.

These procedures, designed to protect your rights, will be monitored by AEL's Institutional Review Board, which has the authority to inspect consent records and data files only to assure compliance with approved procedures.

If you choose to volunteer to participate in a follow-up interview, you may change your mind and decline to participate at a later time. You are under absolutely no obligation to complete an interview and may decline or stop participation at any time before or during the interview.

If you have any questions or concerns about this study, you may contact Patricia Hammer at 800-624-9120 ext. 5437 or hammerp@ael.org. For information about your rights as a participant in this research, please contact Dr. Merrill Meehan, AEL IRB Chair, P.O. Box 1348, Charleston, WV 25325-1348 or call 1-800-624-9120 ext. 5432.

Pre-Notice Letter:

May 20, 2005

<Superintendent>
<School District>
<Address>
<City, State Zip>

Dear <Superintendent>,

The National Association of State Boards of Education (NASBE) has partnered with the Appalachia Educational Laboratory (AEL) in Charleston, WV to take a look at teacher recruitment and retention strategies in rural school districts throughout the United States. Pat Hammer, AEL Director of Communications and Policy Services, and Georgia Hughes, AEL Research and Evaluation Specialist, will be collaborating with me to survey rural districts like yours. Your school district has been randomly selected to participate in this important project.

In about a week, you will receive in the mail a brief questionnaire. The questionnaire, which should take only a few moments to complete, asks for information about recruitment and retention strategies used in your school district, any difficulties your district contends with, and successful practices that you would like to share with rural educators around the country. A postage-paid return envelope will be provided to send your responses directly to AEL.

We hope you will invest a few moments to complete and return the questionnaire. Although we are unable to compensate you directly for your participation, your experiences and insights about recruitment and retention practices and needs in rural districts will contribute important and valuable information to the national search for effective practices in rural education.

If you have any questions or concerns, or if you do not receive a questionnaire within two weeks, please contact Georgia Hughes, a Research and Evaluation Specialist at AEL (800-624-9120, ext. 5413 or hughesg@ael.org). Georgia will be happy to respond to any questions or concerns.

Thank you for your time and commitment to education.

Sincerely,

Michael Hill
NASBE Senior Director, Center for Policy Studies in Rural Education

1st Survey Mailing (include questionnaire & AEL-addressed, postage-paid envelope):

May 25, 2005

<Superintendent>
<School District>
<Address>
<City, State Zip>

Dear <Superintendent>,

About a week ago, I alerted you that your district has been randomly selected to participate in an important study regarding teacher recruitment and retention practices in rural school districts throughout the United States. The Appalachia Educational Laboratory (AEL) and NASBE are collaborating on this important project to discern what tactics for teacher recruitment and retention are working best for rural school districts and what shortfalls in filling vacancies they continue to face. The findings of this project will be shared with policy makers and administrators throughout the nation.

Enclosed with this mailing, you will find a brief questionnaire and a postage-paid return envelope. Please take a few moments to complete the questionnaire and return it to AEL in the enclosed envelope. As a rural school district administrator, your insights and experiences are crucial to helping us gain a better understanding of teacher recruitment and retention strategies, successes, and needs in rural America.

Your participation in this project is voluntary and should involve no risks to you that are greater than those you encounter every day. All information gathered through this survey will be reported at the aggregate level; at no time and in no way will your name or the name of your school district be reported or associated with the data. The data will be stored in secure locations at AEL's Charleston, WV office until the results of the research have been fully reported; only authorized AEL researchers and NASBE staff will have access to the data (which will not include your identifying information)*. AEL and NASBE will take all reasonable precautions to protect the confidentiality of your survey responses.

Again, I hope you will invest a few moments to complete and return the enclosed questionnaire. If you have any questions or concerns about this project, please call Georgia Hughes at AEL (800-624-9120, ext. 5413). Georgia will be happy to respond to any questions or concerns.

Thank you for your time and participation in this important project!

Sincerely,

Michael Hill
NASBE Senior Director, Center for Policy Studies in Rural Education

* *AEL's Institutional Review Board has the authority to inspect consent records and data files only to assure compliance with approved procedures for the protection of research participants.*

1st Reminder Postcard (4 x 6”):

June 3, 2005

A couple of weeks ago, you should have received a questionnaire from AEL and NASBE asking for information about your experiences recruiting and retaining educators in your rural school district. If you have already completed and returned your questionnaire, please accept our thanks! Your responses will give us useful information to share with policy makers across the United States.

If you have not yet had an opportunity to complete and return the questionnaire, please take a few moments to do so. Your experiences and insights are important in helping document the successes and needs of rural educators throughout the nation.

If you have any questions or concerns, or if you would like to request additional questionnaires, please call Georgia Hughes at AEL (800-624-9120, ext. 5413).

2nd Survey Mailing (include questionnaire & AEL-addressed, postage-paid envelope):

June 10, 2005

<Superintendent>
<School District>
<Address>
<City, State Zip>

Dear <Superintendent>,

Near the beginning of this month, I sent you a brief questionnaire asking you about teacher recruitment and retention strategies and successes in your rural school district. If you have already completed and returned your questionnaire, please accept our thanks! Your responses will help us discern what tactics for teacher recruitment and retention are working best for rural school districts. You may disregard or recycle this mailing.

Enclosed with this mailing, you will find a replacement questionnaire and a postage-paid return envelope, which you can use if you have not yet had an opportunity to respond. Please take a few moments to complete the questionnaire and return it to AEL in the enclosed envelope. As a rural school district administrator, your insights and experiences are crucial to helping us gain a better understanding of teacher recruitment and retention strategies, successes, and needs in rural America.

Your participation in this project is voluntary. All information gathered through this survey will be reported at the aggregate level, and neither you nor your school district will be identified in any reporting of the findings. AEL and NASBE will take all reasonable precautions to protect the confidentiality of your responses.

If you have any questions or concerns about this project, please call Georgia Hughes at AEL (800-624-9120, ext. 5413).

Thank you for your time and participation in this important project!

Sincerely,

Michael Hill
NASBE Senior Director, Center for Policy Studies in Rural Education

Final Reminder Postcard (4 x 6”):

June 20, 2005

AEL and NASBE wish you the best of luck as you conclude this school year!

Thank you for being willing to participate in our important project about teacher recruitment and retention practices in rural areas. If you have not yet completed the questionnaire sent to you in April, please take a moment to do so.

Again, thank you for your time and invaluable insight into the successes and needs of rural school districts. If AEL or NASBE can be of assistance to you in the future, please feel free to call on us!

AEL www.ael.org 800-624-9120
NASBE www.nasbe.org 703-684-4000